



This month's theme: American Government

## Checks and Balances in American Government

by Katie Plona

As a lover of politics and as a former campaign and legislative worker in the United States, I am fascinated by the fact that India and the U.S. share a deep love and respect for democracy as the world's two largest democracies, yet there are so many differences between both political systems.

I wish I had asked for a "cheat sheet" on Indian government to better understand all of its complexities. Some of you may feel the same way when you read about President Obama or Congress or about the implications of the upcoming 2012 elections. Here's a handy reference on American government.

### Checks and Balances

In 1776, the United States became a sovereign nation. The men and women of that time fought for independence from the British monarchy because they believed church, or religion, and state should be separate.

The founding fathers created the American government based on several fundamental principles. One of these was that for this new government to be fair and representative of the people, it needed to have a system of "checks and balances." To achieve this goal, the founders created three branches of government – legislative, executive and judiciary.

### Legislative

In the legislative branch, the founding fathers created a bicameral U.S. Congress, meaning it has two equal bodies. One is the Senate and one is the House of Representatives. In the U.S. Senate, regardless of population, each state has two senators who are elected for six-year terms. Every two years, roughly one-third of the Senate is up for reelection. In the House of Representatives, there are 435 members who are elected every two years. Each state's population determines how many representatives it sends to Washington. With a few exceptions in small states, each Congressman or woman represents roughly 700,000 people. The largest state of California has a population of 37 million people and 63 members in the House, whereas the smallest state of Wyoming has a population of 530,000 people and one member in the House. Both states have two senators.

Every ten years, the American government conducts a census to determine the number of people living in the U.S. and shifts in the population. The census forms the basis for the process of redistricting to occur. If a state gains population, it will get more seats in the House. Likewise, if a state loses population, it loses seats.

### Executive

President Barack Obama is the 44th president. He runs the federal government, appoints judges and is commander-in-chief of the U.S. Armed Forces. Americans indirectly elect a president every four years through the Electoral College. Each state's votes in the Electoral College are proportional to the state's population. Traditionally, if at least 50.1 percent of the population votes for a presidential candidate, all of its Electoral College votes go to that candidate. The candidate who gets the majority (270) of the Electoral College's 538 votes wins.

The U.S. is the only country in the world to have this system, and it is controversial. Proponents argue that the Electoral College is good for smaller states because it prevents them from being eclipsed by large states in the popular vote. Opponents argue that it is undemocratic and elevates the importance of "battleground states," whose voters tend to be mixed about who to elect.

### Judiciary

The founding fathers also established in the Constitution the American judiciary, including the U.S. Supreme Court, which is the highest court in the U.S. It has nine justices, one of whom is the chief justice. The President nominates – and the U.S. Senate must confirm – each justice for lifetime tenure in the court. Since 1789, there have been 112 justices. Seventeen have been chief justices.

Following the 2000 election, the U.S. saw the checks and balances in action. Democratic candidate Al Gore won the American popular vote. However, George W. Bush won the votes from the Electoral College. This outcome occurred because of the Electoral College's winner-takes-all nature. If a state has 16 votes in the Electoral College, and 51 percent of the people vote for a certain candidate, that candidate will earn all 16 votes. In the end, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Electoral College and President Bush became president. The only way to change this system would be for Congress to pass a constitutional amendment that three-fourths of states would have to ratify.

Since the day more than 200 years ago when the founding fathers wrote the U.S. Constitution, the system of checks and balances has been one of the key pillars of American government. And in my opinion, it is one of the best things the founders did.

*Katie Plona works at the U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai*

### The American Center

4 New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020 (Tel: 2262-4590; Fax: 2262-4595)  
E-mail: [mumbaipublicaffairs@state.gov](mailto:mumbaipublicaffairs@state.gov); Website: <http://mumbai.usconsulate.gov>  
Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Monday through Friday)

### H O L I D A Y S

September 1: Ganesh Chaturthi  
September 5: Labor Day

## A WORD FROM THE CENTER

Dear Readers,

In September, the American Center highlights the U.S. Constitution that enshrines our nation's status as the oldest democracy in the world. Little consensus existed at the beginning of the 1787 Constitutional Convention on what was necessary to replace the too-weak Articles of Convention, which failed to give the central government sufficient powers to sustain itself (<http://goo.gl/dGkOC>). Convened in Philadelphia, the debates were conducted in closed-door sessions and we can only infer the discussions from the letters written by key participants to their contemporaries (<http://goo.gl/YmWdu>). Toward the end of the debates, a group in favor of ratification and a strong central government – known as the Federalists -- emerged. The Federalists issued a series of written articles with arguments in favor of the Constitution, directed at the politically empowered citizens of that time: that meant an audience that was almost entirely male, white, and wealthy. (<http://goo.gl/VFkw8>)

Today, social media allows for online debates and discussions on all issues: politics, business, food, film... Can you imagine what the U.S. Constitutional Convention would have looked like in the Internet era? The Internet is widely understood as a social tool that is fostering political changes and shifts toward greater democratization and broader public involvement. In very recent history, social media proved itself as a potent tool for political mobilization and organization in the Middle East (<http://goo.gl/SsmJN>). Changes in communication technology represent not merely differences in speed and ubiquity, but also have implications regarding who is engaged and the outcomes of political processes. Equally, the question of those who are left out of the communications revolution (for lack of access or education) must also be considered when assessing the impact of technology as a democratizing force (<http://goo.gl/JJ3QE>). The principal of Internet freedom and freedom of access to information is a key global priority for the United States (<http://goo.gl/ruJbq>).

The American Center and U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai, are online with three main outreach and engagement tools: our website contains key links to information about the Consulate, and important information on guidance about the visa application process (<http://mumbai.usconsulate.gov/>). Our FaceBook page provides information about all American Center public events, and a steady stream of interesting news, fun facts and links relevant to U.S.-India relations (<http://www.facebook.com/amcentermumbai>). Finally, our Twitter account features slightly more comprehensive and substantive content on the U.S.-India relationship and official U.S. visitors to India (<http://twitter.com/#!/amcentermumbai>). I invite you to "like" our FaceBook page and to follow us on Twitter. Please join the discussions with other fans of the American Center and we welcome your feedback on how we are doing – and do let us know how you are doing as well...!

Cordially,



Kapil Gupta  
Information Officer

## Remember, Honor, Believe....

This September 11, 2011, America commemorated ten years since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and the crash site in Pennsylvania.

The 10th anniversary of 9/11 is a milestone for the U.S. and Americans around the world to reflect on the last ten years while looking forward. As we remember those who were lost on 9/11, we also honor all victims of terrorism; citizens of over 90 countries perished in the attacks of 9/11.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, many Americans felt compelled to serve their fellow citizens and communities. As a tribute to that spirit – and to honor those we lost – the 10th anniversary of 9/11 will be the third official observance of September 11 as a National Day of Service and Remembrance.

On September 11, 2011, President Obama visited lower Manhattan, Shanksville, and the Pentagon to pay tribute to the lives of those who were taken from us on 9/11, and to reaffirm that their legacy is a safer, stronger, and more resilient America. Secretary Clinton participated in the commemoration activities in New York. And our missions abroad, including the U.S. Consulate General in Mumbai, organized activities to commemorate the lives of those lost in terror attacks worldwide.



## Jury Trials and the Media Discussion led by Kristy Haller

**Monday, September 19**  
**American Center Auditorium**

**6:00 p.m.**

A guaranteed right by virtue of the Sixth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, an impartial jury trial can often attract unprecedented media attention in the United States. However, freedom of the press is a fundamental right guaranteed by the First Amendment. What happens when these two important civil rights collide? From the seminal case involving Dr. Sam Sheppard in 1966 to modern day dramas such as the O. J. Simpson trial, learn about the interaction between jury trials and the media in the United States.

**Kristy Haller** is originally from Baltimore, Maryland. An attorney in California, she has worked as a research assistant on First Amendment issues and as a judicial intern for the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Baltimore field office. Prior to attending law school, she worked as a journalist for the *Baltimore Sun* and as a multimedia and technology consultant for the World Bank.

**American Center Auditorium**  
**3:30 and 6:30 p.m.**

## FILMS THIS MONTH

The American Center, Mumbai, is trying something new! For the evening shows, we'll have a member of our consulate community introduce the film to you. This is also your opportunity to engage in an active discussion based on the issues of the film in relation to our theme of the month. So come join us Friday, September 9, for *The War Room* and meet a member of our larger consulate community.

**Friday, September 9**

**The WarRoom**  
(1993, 96 mins)

A documentary of the Bill Clinton 1992 presidential campaign and the organization which ran it. Stars James Carville, George Stephanopoulos, and Heather Beckel.



**Friday, September 23**

**War, Inc.**  
(2008, 107 mins)

John Cusack co-wrote, produced and starred in this dark comedy about a professional killer sent to a Middle Eastern nation gripped by social and political unrest after it is seized by a corporation run by a former U.S. vice-president (Dan Aykroyd). Hired by company bigwigs to eliminate the CEOs of their competitors, Cusack finds himself distracted by his attraction to a beautiful field reporter (Marisa Tomei). With Joan Cusack, Hillary Duff, and Ben Kingsley.



**Saturday, September 24 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**



Throughout the year, the American Center hosts a Kids' Saturday@American Center program in the auditorium on the last Saturday of each month from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Entry is free of charge and on a first-come, first-served basis. The event is for children aged between 6 and 15 years. All children under 14 must be accompanied by a parent. While the themes vary, the programs strive to be interactive, educational, and fun, with a focus on American culture and topics that are of mutual interest to citizens from both our countries. A collection of books and educational board games is also available at the Kids' Corner@American Library, Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Please check [www.facebook.com/amcentermumbai](http://www.facebook.com/amcentermumbai)

Send text  
**'JoinUS Kids'**  
OR  
to **54999**

For more information, please call 2262-4590, ext. 2204,  
or e-mail us at [mumbaipublicaffairs@state.gov](mailto:mumbaipublicaffairs@state.gov).

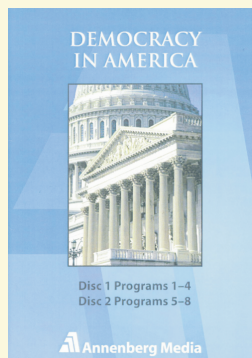




## NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

### Select Resources Available on the Constitution of the United States of America

#### DVDs



#### **Democracy in America**

Annenberg Media

(2003, 15 programs of 30 mins each)

This series is a video course covering topics of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions recommended by the Civics Framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress developed by the U.S. Department of Education. The 15 half-hour programs are hosted by national television correspondent Renee Poussaint.

#### **Disc 1**

Citizenship: Making Government Work

The Constitution: Fixed or Flexible?

Federalism: U.S. v. the States

Civil Liberties: Safeguarding the Individual

#### **Disc 2**

Civil Rights: Demanding Equality

Legislatures: Laying Down the Law

The Modern Presidency: Tools of Power

Bureaucracy: A Controversial Necessity

#### **Disc 3**

The Courts: Our Rule of Law

The Media: Inside Story

Public Opinion: Voice of the People

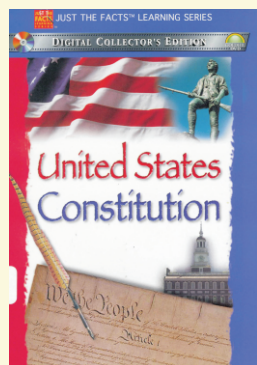
Political Parties: Mobilizing Agents

#### **Disc 4**

Elections: The Maintenance of Democracy

Interest Groups: Organizing To Influence

Global Politics: U.S.A. and the World

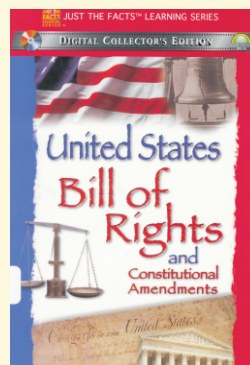


#### **United States Constitution**

Full Circle Entertainment

(2004, 50 mins)

This extraordinary production combines the insight of American political science experts on the interpretation of the Constitution with live action and documentary photography to explain and amplify the most important document in American society – the United States Constitution.



#### **United States Bill of Rights and Constitutional Amendments**

Full Circle Entertainment

(2004, 50 mins)

*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America...* That preface begins the *Bill of Rights*, the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States. In addition, the video also includes all the subsequent amendments made to the Constitution of the United States to the present day.

#### E-Publication

#### **About America: The Constitution of the United States of America with Explanatory Notes (2004)**

<http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/books/constitution.pdf>  
#popup

#### Websites

<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html>

The Charters of Freedom – Constitution of the United States

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/constitution/>  
GPO Access: Constitution of the United States

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003655764/>  
Library of Congress – Constitution of the United States

<http://www.america.gov/constitution.html>  
U.S. Constitution

[http://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution\\_item/constitution.htm](http://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution_item/constitution.htm)  
United States Senate – Constitution of the United States



I've been in India a little over one month and I have been continually impressed by the vibrancy and diversity here. I know that you are the people the Consulate and the American Center relies on the most, and the people I will rely on most

over my next three years.

As some of you know, my last assignment was in Indonesia. In Indonesia we spoke of the partnership between the world's second- and third-largest democracies. Here in India, we talk about the growing partnership between the world's first- and second-largest democracies: India and the United States.

As President Obama said, "India and America are indispensable partners in meeting the challenges of our time." We are not just witnesses to this partnership; we are also participants in it.

Over the coming year, the Consulate General, Mumbai will focus on advancing U.S.-Indian partnership in three important areas:

- Enhancing security cooperation;
- Promoting expanded trade and investment ties; and
- Enhancing people-to-people interactions;

July's terrible attacks in Mumbai remind us that India, like the United States, is a target for terrorists. We face similar, as well as common, security threats. Few tasks are as daunting – or as important – as ensuring the safety and security of our countries. Coordination and cooperation between customs and border officials, police officers, and our security services, will keep our families and neighbors safe.

Meanwhile, the epicenter of the world's economy is shifting away from the Atlantic. We must identify every opportunity to intensify our trade and cooperation.

India and the United States produce the world's greatest entrepreneurs. We routinely break new

ground in science, in medicine, and in technology. There is no doubt that some of the 21st century's greatest technological, commercial, and scientific achievements will result from our cooperation.

And at a time when economic growth and stability can't be taken for granted, together we can build jobs – in both countries – that will improve the quality of life for all our citizens. More and more American workers can proudly say they work for Indian companies, just as more and more Indians work for American companies.

This is a trend we should build upon.

As one of the world's most diverse cities, Mumbai also offers us countless opportunities for cultural and educational exchange. The strongest ties connecting India and the United States are the individual experiences, the personal histories and the family relationships that constitute people-to-people connections. These connections are collectively more powerful and directly relevant than any government initiative could ever hope to be.

And for that reason, we will strive to expand the number of Indians studying in the United States, the number of Americans studying in India, and the links between non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and other groups. People-to-people engagement is where true partnership occurs.

And that's where all of you come in. I ask all of you to help us identify areas where we can work together more closely. Propose new educational programs. Put forward ways to foster innovation. Highlight shared business and financial interests. Help us move from being partners to family.

I look forward to the next three years and working with you to build the U.S. – India partnership.

*Mr. Peter Haas has assumed the post of U.S. Consul General in Mumbai as of August 1st, 2011. Immediately prior to coming to Mumbai, Consul General Haas served as the Counselor for Economic Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia. An economic officer by training, his previous diplomatic posts include London, Rabat, Washington, Port-au-Prince, and Berlin.*

*Consul General Haas holds a BA in International Studies and German from Illinois Wesleyan University. He was a Marshall Scholar at the London School of Economics, where he earned Master of Science degrees in the Politics of the World Economy and Comparative Government.*

*Consul General Haas is accompanied in Mumbai by his wife and two sons. Consul General Haas enjoys CrossFit and hiking.*



## Highlight Past Event



The Consul General of the U.S. in Mumbai, Peter Haas, inaugurated the “Islam in America” exhibit at the iconic Haji Ali Dargah on September 6, 2011. The American Center, Mumbai, in collaboration with Sayed Pir Haji Ali Shah Bukhari Dargah Trust, have hosted this poster and video exhibit to showcase the various aspects of Islam and Muslims in America and celebrate cultural diversity in America.

In cities and towns across the United States, Muslim Americans participate in everyday activities with their fellow Americans, while at the same time maintaining the rich heritage of Islamic tradition. The exhibit is a window to showcase this rich culture of pluralism among American Muslims to the people of India.

Haji Ali Dargah in the city of Mumbai is itself an embodiment of diversity and pluralism.

Consul General Peter Haas extended his invitation to the people of Mumbai to come and visit the exhibit. The exhibit will be open to the public from September 6th to 18th from 10:00 am - 7:00 pm.



## Highlight Upcoming Event

We're taking “America” on the road...to Goa! The American Center, Mumbai has planned three full days of activities in Goa from October 12-14, 2011, ranging from lectures, quizzes, exhibitions, a play, and featuring Goan musicians for Daniel Pearl World Music Days – all to promote a better understanding of the culture, society, values, policies, and institutions of the United States. Follow us on facebook as we update events for our “American Days in Goa” at <http://www.facebook.com/amcentermumbai> or SMS “JoinUS54999” for information.

Edited and designed by  
**Swati Patel and Dhaval Ninawe**  
Copy edited by **Eva Doctor**

Admission to American Center programs, restricted to persons over 14, unless otherwise specified, is on a first-come, first-served basis. The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program

# SATURDAY SCREENINGS

Films start at 2:30 p.m.

**September 3, 2011**

**We Are Marshall (2006, 131 mins)**



In November, 1970, virtually the entire football team and coaches of Marshall University (Huntington, W.V.) die in a plane crash. That spring, led by Nate Ruffin, a player who was ill and missed the fatal flight, students rally to convince the board of governors to play the 1971 season. The college president, Don Dedman, must find a coach, who then must find players. They petition the NCAA to allow freshmen to play, and coach Jack Lengyel motivates and leads young players at the same time that he reexamines the Lombardi creed that winning is the only thing. The

father and the fiancée of a player who died find strength to move on. Can Marshall win even one game in 1971?

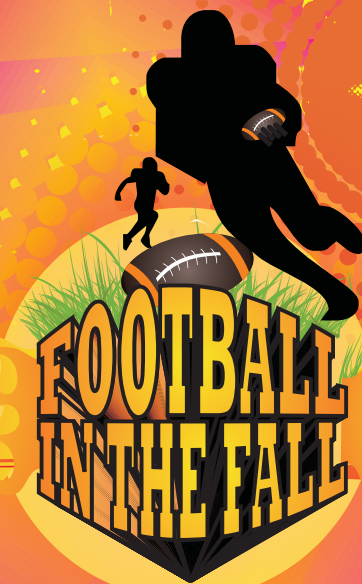
**September 17, 2011**

**Jerry Maguire (1996, 139 min)**



Jerry Maguire (Tom Cruise) is a successful sports agent. The biggest clients, the respect, a beautiful fiancée, he has it all. Until one night he questions his purpose. His place in the world, and finally comes to terms with what's wrong with his career and life. Recording all his thoughts in a mission statement Jerry feels he has a new lease on life. Unfortunately his opinions aren't met with enthusiasm from his superiors and after dishonorably being stripped of his high earning clients and elite status within the agency Jerry steps out into the

sports business armed with only one volatile client (Cuba Gooding Jr.) and the only person with belief in his abilities (Renée Zellweger) with the impossible task of rebuilding what he once had. Along the way he faces the harsh truths which he'd ignored in the past and a host of hardships that he'd never faced before.



**September 10, 2011**

**Remember The Titans (2000, 113 mins)**



Suburban Virginia schools have been segregated for generations, in sight of the Washington Monument over the river in the nation's capital. One Black and one White high school are closed and the students sent to T.C. Williams High School under federal mandate to integrate. The year is seen through the eyes of the football team where the man hired to coach the Black school is made head coach over the highly successful white coach. Based on the actual events of 1971, the team becomes the unifying symbol for the community as the boys and the adults learn to depend on and

trust each other.

**September 24, 2011**

**Invincible (2006, 105 mins)**



In the summer of 1976, 30-year old Vince Papale is having a tough run of luck. He's been working as a supply teacher for two days a week but has just found out that his job has been eliminated because of budget cuts. His wife gives up on him saying he'll never amount to anything and asks for a divorce. He works as a bartender and plays football with his friends. When the new coach of the Philadelphia Eagles, Dick Vermeil, announces that he will hold open tryouts for the team, Vince reluctantly decides to give a try. In an almost unheard of feat, he manages to

make the team and enjoyed a three year career as a professional football player. Based on a true story.

**American Center Auditorium,  
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